

Faith is a Choice

Pastor Joseph Clark – September 10, 2020

“Only through repentance and faith in Christ can anyone be saved. No religious activity will be sufficient, only true faith in Jesus Christ alone.”

- Ravi Zacharias

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

- Hebrews 11:6

Picture this scene:

It is A.D. 31, roughly halfway through Jesus's ministry.

Where? Jerusalem. During Jesus's earlier visit to Jerusalem. Not His final visit prior to His crucifixion. Jesus returns to the temple courts from the Mount of Olives.

Just prior to this, Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees about the woman caught in adultery, and he says, 'Let he without sin cast the first stone'. And everyone walks away.

What is about to happen? He is challenged verbally some more; he preaches some more and then heals the man born blind.

Who is present? The disciples, worshippers, law makers, and the Pharisees. A crowd of people are there.

Jesus is preaching as he walks through the crowd. The disciples are trying to keep up with him and they are listening to Jesus and they are watching the reaction of the people. Jesus is making these incredible claims and saying these amazing things that nobody has heard before. He speaks with the authority of God.

The disciples know that what he is saying can get him and them arrested or stoned to death. They know that they can be arrested for consorting with Jesus.

The crowds have seen the Pharisees preach. But they do not preach like this. Not with authority. They simply quote that which is already written and reference the authority of human authors of the Old Testament. The crowds have seen others who claim to be prophets, but they are usually crackpots and they are run off by the crowds or intimidated by the religious leaders, so they stop. In some cases, they are imprisoned or killed.

It is as though Jesus is not just preaching for those people who are present but preaching for people of all times. As though Jesus knew we would be talking, writing, and reading about it today. He was also speaking to the benefit of His disciples which would start this incredible ripple effect as they are the start of his church on Earth....

John 8:12-30

Dispute Over Jesus's Testimony

¹² When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

¹³ The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."

¹⁴ Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. ¹⁶ But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. ¹⁷ In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. ¹⁸ I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."

¹⁹ Then they asked him, "Where is your father?"

"You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." ²⁰ He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized Him because His hour had not yet come.

Dispute Over Who Jesus Is

²¹ Once more Jesus said to them, “I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.”

²² This made the Jews ask, “Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, ‘Where I go, you cannot come’?”

²³ But he continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.”

²⁵ “Who are you?” they asked.

“Just what I have been telling you from the beginning,” Jesus replied. ²⁶ “I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.”

²⁷ They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up^[a] the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. ²⁹ The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” ³⁰ Even as he spoke, many believed in him.

We do not get to cobble together our faith based on what pleases us, what does not challenge us, and what does not make us uncomfortable. We did not create God, God created us. Therefore, the Word, the Bible, is our authoritative standard. God is the authority; the Bible is the authoritative standard.

We choose to believe. Not because it is believable (if it were easy to believe it would not be miraculous). We choose to believe equally the easy stuff, the stuff that is hard to believe, and the stuff that is challenging to believe.

God does not ask us to choose to have faith once we are convinced that everything is believable. I have heard many say: ‘I am still trying to come to peace with what is in the Bible. I will believe it when I see it.’

No. you will see it when you believe it.

The word of God was authored by the Holy Spirit and written by human hands guided by the Lord. It is written exactly the way that God intended it to be read, exactly the way that God intended it to be interpreted, and it is most importantly, written exactly the way that God intends for us to walk it out and live it.

Are there parts of the Bible that are difficult to believe? Of course, there are. We choose to believe out of faith. We do not dare under-believe. We will face God someday and say ‘Lord, I bought into everything out of faith, obedience, and trust. No matter how much it challenged my puny, scientific, human mind, I chose to believe. I chose to believe because I love You and trust You, and no matter what tests my faith, I buy into You and Your Word unconditionally.’

We do not dare face God and say, ‘I wanted to believe but you know, some of that Bible stuff is a little cinematic. I mean, walking on water? Changing water into wine? Parting the Red Sea? Ascending into the sky? Seriously, I want to believe in You but, that is a bit much for me to swallow.

No! We must face God and say, ‘I choose to believe as I have the faith of a child!’

There is a massive movement out there in the World today called the “Flat Earth Society”. It consists of people who are intrigued by the prospect that the Earth is flat. Despite science providing photographic evidence that the Earth is round, they refuse to believe. If you ask me if I believe the Earth is flat, I will tell you “No, I have seen enough documentation and there are enough credible people who also believe this that I choose to believe that the Earth is round.” Have I seen it for myself? No. I have not gone into space and looked down on a round earth.

But Jesus does not ask us to believe in Him because He is believable. In human terms it is inconceivable, incomprehensible. He manipulated the laws of physics, matter, time, space, probabilities. He does not ask us to believe because we have proof. He advises us to believe out of faith. If we believe out of faith and we choose to receive Him in our hearts in accordance with the Gospels as our Lord and Savior, we are saved.

If I am starving and homeless, and you say to me, “Joseph, I have here a cheque for 1 million dollars. All you need to do is go to the bank and cash it”; and, if I say, “I do not believe that you would give me a cheque for 1 million dollars and the bank is

way over there. I refuse to cash it!” then who is to blame for my poverty? Me or you? I am.

God does not sentence people to Hell. They sentence themselves through disbelief. They had a choice and they chose not to believe.

As I have written previously, Blaise Pascal, born in 1623, remains one of the most famous inventors, physicists, and mathematicians to this very day. He was a Christian. And he created a theorem called “Pascal’s Wager”. The theorem basically proved that there is everything to gain and nothing to lose by choosing to believe and have faith in God. And that there is everything to lose and nothing to be gained by rejecting God. In this life and the next.

So, what does God say to us about belief?

“Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

- John 20:29 ESV

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

- John 14:12-14 ESV

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

- John 3:16 ESV

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”

- John 14:1 ESV

“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

- Romans 10:9-10 ESV

“And Jesus said to him, “‘If you can’! All things are possible for one who believes.”

- Mark 9:23 ESV

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

- Hebrews 11:1 ESV

“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

- Hebrews 11:6 ESV

“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”

- James 2:19 ESV

So, the questions which we need to ask ourselves are:

Do I truly believe?

Have I chosen in my heart to receive Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior?

Do I believe on Sunday?

Do I believe each weekday?

Do I believe in the evening as strongly as in the morning?

Do I believe when I am standing in the face of temptation as much as I believe when I am at Bible Study?

Do I believe when someone cuts me off in traffic or is rude to me as much as when I am singing hymns?

Do I choose out of faith to believe as strongly when I am discouraged as when I am feeling centred?

Do I ask myself when I am doing something questionable, lustful, angry, or I am about to lie on my taxes, “Do you approve of what I am about to do, Lord Jesus Christ?”

Or, is the accuser, the enemy, the tempter, the devil applauding what I am about to do? Brothers and sisters, we CHOOSE to believe and unconditionally buy into everything in the Word, out of faith. And when moments arise that our faith is challenged, that faith is reinforced by love and devotion.

Let us sing ‘All praise to our Lord and Savior, God the son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World, Jesus the Christ. We believe, Lord. We love You, Lord, we trust Your plan and Your timing, Lord, with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we believe. You are the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus Christ. Nobody comes to the Father except through You. We believe, Lord Jesus, there is salvation in no one else, for God has given us no other name under Heaven by which we must be saved, but that of Christ Jesus, we believe. All glory and honor are Yours forever and ever. In the blessed and healing name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.’

Sources:

Biblegateway.com. 2020. Biblegateway.Com: A Searchable Online Bible in Over 150 Versions And 50 Languages. [online] Available at: <<https://www.biblegateway.com/>> [Accessed 3 June 2020].

Topical Bible - Bible Verses by Topic. <https://www.openbible.info/topics/>.

(n.d.). BrainyQuote. <https://www.brainyquote.com/>

30 inspiring Christian quotes. (2020, February 10).

Crosswalk.com. <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/inspiring-quotes/30-inspiring-christian-quotes.html>

What does the Bible say about faith? (n.d.). <https://www.openbible.info/topics/faith>

Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's most-trusted online dictionary.